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TECHNICAL NOTES

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

How to Keep Christmas Trees Fresh

Water has been found the most effective means of retarding the falling of needles from black spruce Christmas trees. In the Lake States the two principal species of evergreens used for Christmas trees are balsam fir and black spruce. Balsam fir retains its needles for a long time, but black spruce, which is a highly desirable tree because of its compact, symmetrical form and dense foliage, sheds very rapidly.

Several methods have been suggested to prevent falling of needles from Christmas trees, including (1) standing the base of the tree in water or (2) in a solution of citric acid, malic acid and calcium carbonate, and (3) covering the needles with a coating of wax to retard drying. In order to learn whether any of these methods assisted materially in preventing the needles from falling, Christmas trees treated in these ways were compared with trees that received no treatment.

It was found that standing the bases of black spruce Christmas trees in plain water was the best method. The water not only caused the needles to remain on the trees longer, but also kept the foliage greener and more healthy looking. Freshly cut trees and trees stored in a frozen condition from 1 to 5 weeks remained in reasonably good condition for 3 weeks when set in water in a heated room. "Dry" trees lost practically all of their needles in the same period, and chemically treated trees were intermediate in behavior. These tests were based upon 36 trees carefully selected for uniformity. In another, somewhat similar test using smaller samples, waxed trees were found to be inferior to watered and chemically treated trees.

In order to enable a tree to absorb water freely, it is suggested to users that they make a fresh, clean cut at the base of the stem before standing the tree in water.

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